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Uzbekistan: Situation of Jews and state protection available (2003 - 2005)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Forum 18, a Website that promotes "the implementation of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and concentrates on serious and obvious breaches of religious freedom" (n.d.), stated that "Uzbekistan's legal infrastructure contains a whole series of laws that restrict religious believers' rights in defiance of the country's international human rights commitments" (20 Apr. 2005). The International Helsinki Federation (IHF) noted that the Jewish community had less serious problems than did other religious communities in Uzbekistan (2004; *International Religious Freedom Report 2005* 8 Nov. 2005, Sec. 2). However, an article from Forum 18 reported that authorities rejected the re-establishment of a rabbinate, which had been abolished when the "restrictive" religious law came into force in 1998 (16 July 2004). According to Chief Rabbi Abe Dovid Gurevich, "a rabbinate is a 'crucial factor' in Judaism. Without such an organisation, Jews can not live their religious lives to the full" (Forum 18 16 July 2004).

The Constitution of Uzbekistan provides for

[e]qual rights for all citizens, irrespective of national or ethnic, religious or linguistic affiliation. All citizens are equal before the law. The population of Uzbekistan includes Koreans, Russians, Tatars, Meskhetin Turks, Jews, Bashkirs, Ukrainians, Germans, Poles and other nations and peoples. All nations and peoples are accorded equal rights for the development of their cultures, the study of their mother tongue, and their national attributes and traditions. Conditions are created for the development of national schools at which representatives of national minorities can receive education in their mother tongue. Recognizing that "positive measures by States may also be necessary to protect the identity of a minority and the rights of its members to enjoy and develop their culture and language and to practise their religion in community with the other members of the group" Uzbekistan has established schools that provide instruction in the Korean, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Russian, German and other languages (UN 3 Aug. 2005).

International Religious Freedom Report 2005 noted that the emigration of Jews from Uzbekistan was in large part due to a lack of economic possibilities and the fact that this community maintained contact with family abroad (8 Nov. 2005 Sec. 3).

According to the Government of Uzbekistan, there were Sunday schools that provided education for Jews (24 June. 2004). "The Government 'Jewish school' operates in Tashkent's Yakkasaroy District" and there are Jewish Kindergartens in Taskent and Samarkand which help Jewish children to learn more about their own culture (*International Religious Freedom Report 2005* 8 Nov. 2005, Sec. 2, Sec. 3). According to the *International Religious Freedom Report 2005*, synagogues operated with freedom and "the publication of a community newspaper take[d] place undisturbed." (ibid. Sec. 3) The 2004 *Freedom in the World* report stated that even though "racial and ethnic discrimination is prohibited by the law, the belief that senior positions in government and business are reserved for ethnic Uzbeks is widespread."

A news article from the Russian news agency Ferghana.ru reported that journalist Aleksey Volosevich, a correspondent of the news agency, was attacked in Tashkent (11 Nov. 2005). Five people "knocked him down. ... In the meantime, several hooligans painted obscene words and anti-Semitic slogans. ... 'A mercenary journalist, a Jew who does not have a clue about Islam, lives here', one of the slogans sai[d]" (Ferghana.ru 11 Nov. 2005). The article noted that Volosevich had reported the attack to the Uzbek authorities and that the act of writing anti-Semitic slogans on his apartment was punishable under an article of the country's criminal code that condemns "'inciting interethnic discord'" (ibid.). Information on whether those responsible for the attack have been punished could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

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Additional Sources Consulted

Internet sites, included: Amnesty International, Center for Religious Freedom, Central Intelligence Agency, Euroasianet.org, Human Rights Internet, Human Rights Watch, International Committee of the Red Cross, International Press Institute, IRIN, JTA, NCSJ, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Radio Free Europa, UCSJ, UK House of Commons - Foreign Affairs Committee.

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